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ABSTRACT

Schools today face serious, daily threats to the safety of students and staff. Students and school employees become victims when experiencing a crime against themselves or when threatened by the perpetration of a crime. On school grounds, these crimes are most often assaults, robberies, and extortion. Recent studies have highlighted the pervasiveness of victimization problems. Through legislation and court decisions, the student's right to a safe school environment has begun to be recognized. To deal with the problem of school safety, educators must assess the nature of their particular problem. A standardized reporting procedure of criminal and violent acts is required. Prevention strategies include clear school policies, workshops and seminars, peer-tutoring corps, adults on campus, community committees, law-related education curricula, in-service training, special student activities, assertiveness training, safe corridor programs, buddy systems, and victim witness programs. Successful intervention strategies include teacher training, arbitration and mediation, community newsletters, and safe school legislation. Response strategies include immediate arrest and media contact, interagency crisis referral team, safe schools/internal affairs department, youth re-entry programs, victimization adjustment classes, school board policies, retraining alternatives, and schedule adjustments. (Local victimization programs, national resource organizations, and sources of relevant literature are listed.) (ABL)

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STUDENT AND STAFF VICTIMIZATION

NSSC RESOURCE PAPER

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STUDENT AND STAFF VICTIMIZATION

The student-related school problems of bygone days consisted mostly of a few playground squabbles and some schoolboy pranks. But a mischievous Tom Sawyer-type is the least of our worries now.

These days our schools face serious, daily threats to the safety of students and staff. Too many schools are having to deal with problems of crime, violence, vandalism and drug abuse. As these problems extend off the streets and into the nation's educational institutions, the victims affected include more students and school employees.

Only in recent years has the nation focused attention on crime victims and their rights. The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime was established in 1982 and prior to that, in 1976, the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) was founded as an "umbrella" organization to coordinate victim advocacy efforts nationwide.

No individual or group of people is immune from possible victimization -- not even our school children.

When crime and violence invade our campuses, students are victimized twice -- once when they become actual victims of crime, violence, disruption or fear; and again when their education is interrupted.

No matter how excellent teachers and their instructional tools may be, learning is hampered when teachers are forced to teach and students are forced to learn in settings of fear, crime and violence.

Defining what is meant by student and staff victimization is an essential step toward solving the problem. In a very general sense, students and school employees become victims when experiencing a crime perpetrated against them or when they are threatened by the perpetration of a crime. On school grounds, these crimes are most often assaults, robberies and extortion.

Assaults are perhaps the least understood crimes occurring on our nation's campuses. All too often, educators are not trained to recognize the legal difference between fights and assaults, nor at what point a fight escalates into an assault. Most realize the importance of such a differentiation - fighting is noncriminal misconduct involving the mutual participation of all parties. An assault, however, is both a criminal and violent offense involving unlawful physical or violent actions that vary considerably in severity, ranging from simple assaults like jostling, verbal abuse, tearing clothes or seizing a person, to serious assaults like beatings, rape or murder.

A robbery occurs with the taking from a person something of value by using force or violence. Robbery can include extortion which involves the use of mild threats or intimidation to demand money or something of value from another person. One of the most common occurrences is the extorting of lunch money by some students.

All three of these crimes involve another important but misunderstood aspect of victimization - the fear factor, or the fear expressed by students and school employees of being bothered or hurt while on school grounds.

EXTENT OF THE VICTIMIZATION PROBLEM

The pervasiveness of victimization problems has been explored in several studies conducted over the past decade. The earliest of these studies was the 1978 Violent Schools - Safe Schools, conducted by the National Institute of Education. The report highlighted a series of startling statistics about criminal activity in our nation's schools during a one-month period including the following:

* Approximately 282,000 secondary students reported being attacked.

* Almost eight percent of urban junior and senior high school students missed at least one day of school a month because they were afraid to go to school.

* Approximately 5,200 secondary teachers were physically attacked, 1,000 of whom were injured seriously enough to require medical attention.

* About 6,000 secondary teachers had something taken by force, weapons or threat.

* Approximately 525,000 attacks, shakedowns and robberies occurred in public secondary schools in one month.

The report also concluded that the risk of violence to teenagers was greater in school than elsewhere. While an average of 21 percent of all secondary students said they avoided restrooms and were afraid of being bothered or hurt at school, 12 percent of teachers hesitated to confront misbehaving students because of fear of reprisal.

In 1983, the Cabinet Council on Human Resources, Working Group on School Violence and Discipline, was created to advise President Reagan about the nature of the school problem and how the federal government should be involved in any prevention and control efforts.

In 1984, the Working Group's Report was submitted to the President. Among its basic premises were the belief that an

orderly school environment was essential to learning; that disorder in some American schools was significant enough to pose obstacles to positive educational experiences; and that no amount of money, teacher raises or improved facilities, materials or curricula will encourage students to learn if they are distracted or fearful.

A series of recent regional and local studies also indicate alarming rates of victimization being reported by students and school employees. Some of these studies and their findings include:

* A 1983 Boston Public Schools Survey found 30 percent of middle and high school teacher respondents reported being victimized at least once on school premises.

* A March 1984 survey conducted by the California School Employees Association found 36 percent of the respondents reported being physically attacked at school and 46 percent reported they feared for their safety while on the job.

* A 1983-84 poll conducted by the Los Angeles Unified School District found that teachers were the victims of 231 violent attacks by students, intruders and parents; that 60 percent of area teachers did not feel safe on their school campuses; that 59 employees missed four or more weeks of work as a result of violence-related physical injury or psychological trauma; and that another 83 teachers stayed out of school at least one day for the same reasons.

Dr. Alfred M. Bloch, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, says he has examined more than 1,000 teachers, many of whom describe the setting in which they teach as the "combat zone." They describe symptoms of fatigue, of headaches, of gastrointestinal problems, of cardiovascular problems, hypertension," says Bloch. "What we are seeing is very much akin to the kind of stress that soldiers in World War II and the Korean War had experienced."

It is important to note the educational community is not in agreement about whether victimization figures have actually increased or decreased since the Safe Schools study. However, most people agree that any level of victimization is unacceptable.

Everybody in school is a potential victim. Research indicates, however, students more frequently are victims of violent crime in school than are teachers. Younger, less experienced teachers are more likely to be attacked or robbed than older colleagues.

Statistics indicate male students are more than twice as likely to be victims of both robbery and assault as female students, and junior high school students are twice as likely to be robbed or assaulted as senior high students.

Minority students are more likely to be attacked or robbed at school than white students. This probably is because they are more likely to attend schools in low-income neighborhoods, according to a 1983 study by Jackson Toby, school crime researcher. Also, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of violent school crimes are recognized by their victims, indicating most of the offenders are fellow students, not intruders.

President Reagan acknowledged the seriousness of the issue in a speech to secondary school principals, "As long as one teacher is assaulted, one classroom disrupted, or one student is attacked, then I must and will speak out to give you the support you need to enforce discipline in our schools. I can't say it too forcefully, to get learning back into our schools, we must get crime and violence out."

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As educators, courts and lawmakers begin to recognize students have an undeniable right to a safe school environment, our legal system has turned its attention to the plight of school crime and violence victims.

The United State Supreme Court's recognition of the issue is reflected in its statement "maintaining order in the classroom has never been easy, but in recent years school disorder has taken particularly ugly forms: drug use and violent crime in the schools have become major problems."

In the words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger, "The serious challenge of restoring a safe school environment has begun to reshape the law." This can be seen most notably in California, where the drive to promote safe schools led to an amendment of the state constitution which says students have "the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure and peaceful." In other states a right to safe schools is being developed through court decisions.

California's "Right to Safe Schools" amendment was part of Proposition 8, which was passed by voters in 1982. The initiative, known as "The Victims' Bill of Rights," was designed to "restore victims' rights and help bring violent crime under control."

It is a school's responsibility to make sure students are provided educational opportunities in a peaceful learning environment. In its final report, dated December 1982, the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime made recommendations for Federal and State action as well as for various agencies and institutions, including schools.

"Educators carry a public trust in the instruction of children," states the report, "This trust means that educators are obliged to teach shared cultural values in an environment that is both scholarly and safe."

The following recommendations from the report are meant to help educators lessen crime's impact and reduce the number of victims.

1. School authorities should develop and require compliance with guidelines for prompt reporting of violent crimes committed in schools, crimes committed against school personnel, and the possession of weapons or narcotics.

2. School authorities should check the arrest and conviction records for sexual assault, child molestation, or pornography offenses of anyone applying for work in a school, including anyone doing contract work involving regular proximity to students, and make submission to such a check a precondition for employment.

3. Educators should develop and provide courses on the problems, needs and legal interests of victims of crime.

4. School authorities should be mindful of their responsibility to make students aware of how they can avoid being victimized by crime.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH VICTIMIZATION

Understanding what comprises student and school employee victimization as well as the extent of criminal activities is just the first step to solving the problem. Educators must then assess the nature of their particular problem -- when and where victimization is occurring, how often, and why -- before they can plan and carry out appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. This can most effectively be done by keeping accurate and regular victimization records through a formal procedure known as incident reporting. Incident reporting requires that school districts design and implement a standardized system for reporting and regularly analyzing all criminal incidents, including victimization.

Individual school administrators must be equally committed to implementing the adopted incident reporting system on their campuses. To incur such a commitment, the school board should pass a written districtwide policy requiring school personnel to report all criminal and violent incidents through a standardized procedure. Once such a policy is passed, it remains for district and school administrators to work with law enforcement officials to design and implement a cooperative reporting system.

Once district and school personnel have assessed their particular victimization problems, they must explore a wide range of prevention, intervention and response strategies that have already been successful in other schools. Over the past decade, the issue of student and school employee victimization has prompted a wide array of programs.

Prevention Strategies

1. Clear school policies

   Written school policies should be distributed to students, parents and community members so it is clear that any assault or violent action (as defined by state penal codes or local ordinances) is a crime and will result in arrest, as well as vigorous school efforts to help prosecute the offender.

2. Workshops and seminars

   Teachers and students can learn about how to control anger in a potentially explosive situation through the help of workshops and seminars conducted by law enforcement, human relations managers and medical personnel.

3. Peer-tutoring corps

   Secondary students are trained by educators, community members and law enforcement officers in crime prevention tactics and anti-victimization strategies. Corps members give speeches, lectures and demonstrations to elementary schools and community-based organizations. In some cases, corps members become trained actors and present their message through theatrical vignettes.

4. Adults on campus

   Having high visibility of adults on campus at all times ensures that students know criminal activity will be witnessed and handled strictly according to school rules.

5. Community committee or task force

   Form a community delinquency prevention committee or task force comprised of community members, educators, students and law enforcers who design, coordinate and implement a community-wide delinquency prevention project.

6. Law-related education curricula

   Establish curricula designed to create an understanding of and support for the legal, political and educational institutions of America's constitutional democracy and the fundamental values, processes and principles upon which they were founded.

7. Educator in-service training

   Hold in-service training aimed at changing how teachers perceive and relate to nonconforming, troubled youth in the daily school routine, as well as developing and implementing more responsive procedures and techniques for positive interaction with nonconforming students.

8. Special student activities

   Hold lunch time, on-campus activities and after school, community activities designed to encourage students, school employees and community members to communicate and participate in recreational activities together in a positive manner.

9. Assertiveness training

   Hold assertiveness training for students and school personnel to help people learn how to stand up for their beliefs and rights in a non-agressive, positive and assertive manner.

10. Safe corridor programs

    Establish a program whereby educators, law enforcers and community members identify certain safe pathways between school and home and provide assistance when going to and from school.

11. Buddy system

    Coordinate a system with students that teams a victim with other students while they pass through high-risk areas on the school campus.

12. Victim witness programs

    Establish programs that train youthful and adult volunteers to act as appropriate witnesses.

Intervention Strategies

Intervening in assaultive and other violent behavior is one of the most difficult strategies for school personnel. Often, it is easier to prevent or respond to a situation than it is to intervene or divert. However, some successful intervention strategies have been identified:

1. Teacher in-service training

   Provide in-service training designed to help teachers know how to keep a fight from escalating into an assault.

2. Arbitration and mediation

   Form teams of educators, law enforcers and community members that provide specialized services to identified violence-prone students or groups, as well to potential victims of violence.

3. Community newsletter

A monthly newsletter published by the school helps keep parents and community members informed of arbitration and mediation efforts, victimization-avoidance strategies or workshops, and school involvement in community intervention efforts.

4. Safe school legislation

Support legislation, such as the California model, that mandates the right of students to attend safe schools. Such legislation should be written cooperatively by educators, law enforcers, attorneys and community members who, in turn, lobby their state legislators for passage.

Response Strategies

Responding to assaults and other violent school crimes places any school in a short- and long-term crises situation. To comprehensively deal with such a situation, both short-term response strategies designed to immediately handle the incident and long-term strategies created to punish offenders and counsel the victims are necessary. Successful response strategies include:

1. Immediate arrest

The perpetrator should be arrested immediately, then a brief explanation of the facts should be given to students, school personnel, parents of offending youth and community groups.

2. Immediate media contact

The principal should immediately call a trusted local reporter from whom an accurate account of the campus problem may be expected.

3. Interagency team for crises referrals

Schools, law enforcement and health professionals work together to form a team to provide referral services for offenders and victims.

4. Safe schools/internal affairs department

Districts form such departments with the aim of making schools safer and more conducive to a positive educational process. Staff activities would include assisting school administrators with investigating serious crimes; teaching crime prevention and anti-victimization classes to students and school personnel; and serving as liaisons with appropriate law enforcement and social service agencies after a crime is committed.

5. Youth re-entry program

Students who are institutionalized for an assaultive or other violent crime should be enrolled in a program that includes educational, vocational and psychological components. Specialized assistance should continue when a student is returned to the school district. School representatives should work with the courts to establish conditions of probation. Educators are involved in the institutional program component and law enforcers, probation officers and health professionals are involved in the school re-entry component.

6. Victimization adjustment classes

Students, family members and school personnel victims should be offered specialized assistance from health and law enforcement professionals about how to deal with their victimization. Classes emphasize that the victim's problems are largely determined by how others perceive and treat the victim and his or her victimization. Further, classes assist school victims in meeting four specialized crises needs: medical treatment, emotional support, financial help and legal assistance.

7. School board policies

Policies should guarantee the safety of educators and other school personnel from physical attacks on their persons or property and provide reimbursement for loss. A possible model is the policy suggested by the National Education Association which states:

"The Association believes that when school personnel are the victims of physical attack, verbal abuse, harassment, or theft, they should receive the full support of their employer in pursuing legal and other remedies.

"The Association further believes that the local association must have the right to reflect the concerns of the profession at a student suspension or expulsion hearing.

"The Association urges its affiliates to cooperate with juvenile court systems to secure strict enforcement of juvenile law in cases involving disturbances in the public schools."

8. Retraining alternatives

Retraining for school personnel victims gives them an opportunity to move into a new profession or accept another position within the district. Such training is reimbursed by the district.

9. Schedule adjustments

Efforts should be made to prevent contact between the victim and perpetrator as much as possible. Make sure they are not in the same classes and have the staff help watch for the victim's safety.

VICTIMIZATION PROGRAMS

The National School Safety Center has become aware of the following programs designed to prevent, intervene in and respond to assaultive and other violent action that may occur on campus:

Boston Youth Program

818 Harrison Avenue
House Officers Building, 4th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02118
617/424-5196

Contact: Dr. Deborah Stith

The educational unit of an adolescent health project encourages students to accept anger as a normal emotion and learn how to creatively control such anger to avoid violent behavior. The course is taught by a specially trained physician to a 10th grade Health Education class at Boston's inner city Jeremiah Burke High School.

Students are encouraged to "play out" various anger-producing situations, including peer-related fights, family violence and interpersonal relationships. The situations are discussed and strategies are developed to deal appropriately with feelings of potential violence. Students also learn that if they respond violently to practices they consider to be unfair, they diminish their power to influence change.

Retraining Program

Los Angeles City Schools
450 North Grand
Los Angeles, California 90012
213/625-6864

Contact: Lee Cazes

Any school employee who is injured as a result of school violence and whose doctor says he or she cannot return to his or her job, is retrained by the district. Under the workmen's compensation program, personnel can choose to be retrained for a job within the district or for an entirely new career. Employees receive pay during retraining endeavors.

The school district contracts with a local firm that acts as the worker's compensation agent that handles the program.

Mediation Alternative Project (MAP)

382 Main Street
Port Washington, New York 11050
516/883-3006

Contact: Rebecca Bell, Director

MAP is a nonprofit center for the development of innovative criminal justice and education programs. Its primary goal is to offer conflict resolution services to help youth, families, schools and the community-at-large to resolve youth-related disputes. MAP employs professional, impartial mediators to help disputing parties reach a written agreement. MAP also conducts follow-up interviews and meetings. All mediation is voluntary and MAP services are available to Nassau County, New York residents free-of-charge.

Among the disputes handled by MAP are: parent/child conflicts; community/youth problems like harassment and vandalism; school-related problems such as fighting between youths; minor criminal acts involving restitution; neighborhood disputes between families; and inter-racial conflicts.

NATIONAL RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

U.S. Department of Justice
Community Relations Service
5550 Friendship Blvd., Room 330
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
202/492-5929

For regional offices, contact:

Atlanta - Room 900
75 Piedmont Avenue, NE.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
404/331-6883

Boston - Room 1116
89 Broad Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02110
617/223-5170

Chicago	-	Room 1113 175 West Jackson Blvd. Chicago, Illinois 60604 312/353-4391
Kansas City	-	Room 2411 911 Walnut Street Kansas City, Missouri 64106 816/374-2022
New York	-	Room 3402 26 Federal Plaza New York, New York 10278 212/264-0700
Philadelphia	-	Room 309 2nd and Chestnut Streets Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106 215/597-2344
San Francisco	-	Room 1040 211 Main Street San Francisco, California 94105 415/974-0101
Seattle	-	Room 1898 915 Second Avenue Seattle, Washington 98174 206/442-4465

National Crime Prevention
Institute
Shelby Campus
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky 40292
502/588-6987

National Alliance for
Safe Schools
501 North Interregional
Asutin, Texas 78702
512/396-8686

American Bar Association
Special Committee on Dispute Resolution
Pru Kestner
2nd Floor South
1800 M Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/331-2258

National Association for
Mediation in Education (N.A.M.E.)
c/o Mediation Project
University of Massachusetts
425 Amity Street
Amherst, Massachusetts 01002
413/545-2462

National Institute for
Dispute Resolution
Michael Lewis, Deputy Director
1901 L Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/466-4764

National Organization for
Victim Assistance (NOVA)
1757 Park Road, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20010
202/393-6682

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE INFORMATION

The following resources are available to inform and assist educators, community members and the general public with school victimization issues:

Blauvelt, Peter D. Effective Strategies for School Security. National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981.

Bybee, Rodger W. and Gee, Gordon E. Violence, Values and Justice in the Schools. Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1982.

Goldstein, Arnold P., Apter, Steven J. and Harootunian, Berj School Violence. Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1984.

Pepperdine Law Review, "Victim's Rights" Symposium. Pepperdine University School of Law, Malibu, California, 1984.

Rapp, James W., Carrington, Frank and Nicholson, George, School Crime and Violence: Victims' Rights, Pepperdine University Press, Malibu, California, 1986.

Rubel, Robert J. The Unruly School. Lexington Books, 1977.

Toby, Jackson "Violence in School" in Crime and Justice, An Annual Review of Research. University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Toward Better and Safer Schools - A School Leader's Guide to Delinquency Prevention. National School Boards Association, 1984.

U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Education. "Violent Schools - Safe Schools" The Safe School Study Report to Congress. Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1978.

Vestermark, Seymour D. Jr. and Blauvelt, Peter D. Controlling Crime in the School, A Complete Security Handbook for Administrators. Parker Publishing Company, Inc. 1978.